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EXAMINATION

Of what has been advanced

RELATING TO

Moral Obligation,

In a late PAMPHLET, entitled,

A Defence of the Anſwer to the Remarks upon Dr. *Clarke*'s Expoſition of the Church-Catechiſm.

By JOHN CLARKE, *Maſter of the Publick Grammar-School in* HULL.

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An Examination, &c.

THE Controverſy relating to Dr. CLARKE's *Expoſition of the Church-Catechiſm* being in the Hands of two Gentlemen of very eminent Character in the learned World, for great Parts and Abilities, it may look like Preſumption in me to pretend to interpoſe betwixt them; and therefore I judge it requiſite before I proceed upon the propoſed Examination, to ſay a few Words by Way of Apology for my Conduct upon this Occaſion.

When I firſt look'd into this Diſpute, which has now ſo much engaged the Attention of the Learn'd and Curious, I little imagin'd I ſhould be ever involv'd in it, but expected to be only an unconcern'd Spectator of the Combat, and propoſed to my ſelf abundance of Satisfaction in ſeeing all the Art of Reaſoning diſplay'd in the moſt entertaining and edifying manner, by Diſputants that appeared to me excellently qualified for the Work they were engaged in. But preſently finding the Mention of my Name introduced

troduced into the Diſpute by one of the Gentlemen, in a manner that lays me under a very great Obligation to his Civility, and was conſequently not likely to be very agreeable to his Opponent, I begun to be ſomewhat apprehenſive of a direct Attack upon my *Foundation of Morality*, for the Doctrine and Reaſoning therein, relating to the Riſe of *Moral Obligation*, upon account of which, my Book was referred to and recommended. But the Gentleman I was afraid of, whether out of Regard to me or himſelf, did not think fit in his Reply, to take any Notice of my Book; but however for ſeveral Pages together ſtrenuouſly battled the Notion I had pleaded for, tho' without attempting to invalidate any thing I had urged in its Defence. And as I apprehend his Way of Writing has a Tendency to involve a Subject of great Importance, in further Obſcurity and Darkneſs, which has been darkned enough already, I judge That a ſufficient Warrant to joyn my Endeavours with thoſe of the Worthy Author on the other Side of the Queſtion, in order to clear up and vindicate the Truth in this Matter. And herein, I preſume, I take no more Liberty than every By-Stander has, of offering any thing he has material to ſay to a Debate of ſo much Importance; a Liberty that has been actually taken by two Gentlemen on the other Side, but with ſo much Hurry and Precipitation, as if they had been afraid, they ſhould not live long enough to ſhew their Wiſdom to the World, if they did not make vaſt Haſte, tho' I do not find upon Enquiry, they are either old or infirm.

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I do not come after the Gentleman I preſume to ſecond in this Cauſe, as if I thought he had not already confuted the Opinion of his Opponent, relating to the Foundation of Morality. He has, in my Judgment, done it very effectually and ſubſtantially. But as he had ſeveral other Points to diſcuſs, and was, it's likely, apprehenſive of being drawn out to too great a Length, if he took particular Notice of every thing advanced upon that Head, he did not think it neceſſary to give himſelf that Trouble. But as there are Readers, to whom a particular Examination of our Author's Reaſoning will be agreeable; and as it may be of Service to Truth to have it placed in different Lights, thoſe Conſiderations have induced me to draw my Pen upon this Occaſion, and are, I ſuppoſe, ſufficient to juſtify me in it; if what I have to offer, may deſerve the Attention of the Publick, of which my Readers are to be the Judges. And ſo much may ſuffice by Way of Apology for my preſent Undertaking.

If the Author of the *Defence* would have been at the Pains of reading my *Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice conſidered*, he might thereby perhaps have ſaved himſelf the Trouble of writing ſeven or eight Pages of his Book relating to *Moral Virtue* and *Obligation*. But the very Name of a Country School-Maſter is enough to prejudice abundance of People againſt any thing, ſuch a one can ſay, upon ſo abſtruſe a Subject, that lies ſo much too out of the Way of his Province. And therefore I do not much wonder, if the learn'd Author of

the *Defence* has never thought it worth his while to look into that Piece; as I am fit to believe he never did, or at moſt but very ſlightly and ſuperficially; ſince his Doctrine ſeems ſo thoroughly confuted therein, that if he had read it fairly, and with due Attention, he would have found it neceſſary, either to have ſaid a great deal more than he has done, or nothing at all. I hope however he will do me the Honour to read this Piece of mine with Care, and honour me moreover with an Anſwer, if he finds what is here alledged againſt his Doctrine of Weight enough to require it, as I have ſome Reaſon to believe a great many, and thoſe of the beſt Judges too, will think it is. But leaving that Matter to be determin'd according to his Diſcretion, I now proceed to the Work propoſed.

With Regard to the *Foundation of Morality in Practice*, or the *Original of Moral Obligation*, there are two Opinions. 1. That of thoſe who derive the ſame from the Law of God, and hold that without ſuch a Law, Mankind would lie under no Obligation to the conſtant Practice of Virtue, but be at full Liberty to act otherwiſe; nay, indeed, obliged (in a vulgar and proper Senſe of the Word) to act otherwiſe, in all Caſes, where the ſaid Practice would prove inconſiſtent with their preſent happineſs in this Life, if God had not bound the ſame upon them by a Law, enforced by a Sanction of future Rewards and Puniſhments, agreeably to what St. *Paul* ſays, *If there be no Reſurrection*, i. e.

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no future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*

2. The ſecond Opinion is of thoſe who make the Obligation to the conſtant Practice of Virtue, in its Riſe, previous to all Law, and independent thereon, and pretend to fetch it from what they call the Eternal Differences of things, the Neceſſary and Eternal different Relations that different Things bear to one another, Fitneſſes in things themſelves, Reaſons, Reſpects and Proportions of Things, as they word themſelves. Theſe they tell us bind the Almighty himſelf. And that with Regard to them the Will of God always, and *neceſſarily* determines itſelf to act according to Juſtice and Goodneſs; and that therefore theſe ſame Relations, Fitneſſes and Proportions of Things ought likewiſe conſtantly to determine the Wills of all ſubordinate Rational Beings accordingly: That they make it fit and reaſonable for Creatures ſo to act, they cauſe it to be their Duty, or lay an Obligation upon them ſo to do, even ſeparate from the Conſideration of the Rules of Virtue being the poſitive Will or Command of God; and alſo antecedent to any Reſpect, or Regard, Expectation, or Apprehenſion, of any particular, private, and perſonal Advantage, or Diſadvantage, Reward or Puniſhment, either preſent or future, annexed either by natural Conſequence, or by poſitive Appointment, to the practiſing, or neglecting thoſe Rules. So that tho' there was no future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, Men would nevertheleſs be obliged to the conſtant Practice of Virtue, tho' attended with

with never ſo much Pain, Uneaſineſs and Miſery. The Former of theſe two Opinions is very plain and intelligible and appears moreover to be the Truth of the Caſe. The latter under a pompous Shew of great Exactneſs, and vaſt Profundity, when it comes to be examined into, ſeems little more than a Heap of unintelligible Words, amaſſed together to no purpoſe, and has a Tendency to make Morality appear ridiculous, and expoſe it to the Scorn and Banter of profane Men.

The Great Patron of this latter Doctrine was Dr. *Clarke*, if he was not the Inventer of it; and herein he is followed by the Author of the *Defence*, who begins what he has to ſay for it at Page 6. by telling us that '*Moral Virtue conſiſts in the Conformity of* '*our Actions to the Reaſons of Things, in* '*whatever relates to other Intelligent Beings,* '*or our ſelves.*' The Conformity of Actions to the *Reaſons* of Things, as the Phraſe is uſed by ſuch as follow the Scheme our Author has undertaken to defend, is a ſort of Language that has been ſufficiently expoſed, and ſhewn to be utterly void of all Meaning, by Mr. *Hutcheſon* in his Treatiſe upon the *Paſſions*. But however let us try if we can twine or twiſt it to any Manner of Senſe; for *Conformity of Actions to the Reaſons of Things*, is an Expreſſion at leaſt far enough from having any very obvious Meaning. For what are theſe ſame *Reaſons* of Things? Are they ſuch Reaſons for, or Motives to, Action or Forbearance, as the Nature of Things, if

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duly and thoroughly conſidered will ſuggeſt to us? For this is all, I think, that can be made of that Expreſſion, and yet this, I doubt, will not ſerve our Author's Purpoſe at all. For,

By a Reaſon for an Action is meant ſome Truth ſhewing more or leſs the Fitneſs thereof for the Attainment of ſome End naturally deſirable in and for it ſelf. I ſay naturally deſirable in and for itſelf; that is, ſuch as the Mind from natural Inſtinct, or its very Frame and Conſtitution is diſpoſed to purſue and embrace for its own Sake. For unleſs the ultimate End for which any Action is ſhewn to be fit, be ſuch, the Mind is not moved at all; nor can the Truth ſhewing the Fitneſs of an Action for ſuch a Purpoſe be any Reaſon for, or Motive to, the Action at all. This is evident to the laſt Degree. Now there appears to be nothing deſirable in and for itſelf but *Pleaſure*; for that the Mind ſhould deſire, be fond of, or purſue with a Concern any thing upon its own Account, but what pleaſes it, or under any other Conſideration than that of being pleaſing and agreeable to it, is, I think, an apparent Contradiction. Now from hence it follows, that

1. All Reaſons for, or Motives to, Action or Forbearance, preſuppoſe a Senſe of Pleaſure and Pain, with a Deſire of the former, and an Abhorrence of the latter, as neceſſary, and inſeparable from Human Nature. For, to illuſtrate this Matter yet further, let us imagine an intelligent Being, void of all Senſe for the Reception of Pleaſure or Pain of any Kind whatever, and by Conſequence uncapable of either Happineſs or

Miſery; and he neither will nor can have any Inclination or Averſion for one thing more than another, for Action more than Reſt, or *vice verſa*. Now to ſuch a Being as this, 'tis evident, there can be no Reaſon or Motive offered, ſufficient to excite him to Action of any Kind, or its Contrary, Reſt. He may act or forbear to act indeed arbitrarily, without Reaſon or Motive, as a Man may wag his Finger, or hold it ſtill, where he has no Reaſon for one more than the other. But all the Reaſon and Rhetorick in the World will never be able to raiſe in him an Inclination or Averſion for one thing more than another, or produce in him a Diſpoſition to Action in any Caſe that can be propoſed to him, more than Reſt, or to Reſt more than Action. For that all Inclination and Averſion take their Riſe from a View to Pleaſure and Pain of ſome kind or other, and thoſe only, is a Truth ſo very obvious, ſo much confirmed by conſtant and univerſal Experience, that no Man who can think at all, and is not ſtrangely blinded by Prejudice, can miſs ſeeing it, I ſhould think: But if any of my Readers want further Satisfaction about it, they may be pleaſed to have recourſe to my *Foundation of Morality*, for it.

2. From what has been ſaid, it appears what kind of Reaſons are by Nature fitted to be Motives, are naturally proper to move or excite a Being capable of Happineſs and Miſery, to Action, or its Contrary, viz. ſuch as to his Apprehenſion at leaſt, ſhew the neceſſary or probable Tendency of his acting or for-

forbearing to act, to the procuring of Pleaſure, or avoiding of Pain, of ſome kind or other, and ſuch only. For with regard to every Thing elſe but Pleaſure and Pain, with the apprehended Means of producing them, he is in the ſame State of Indifferency exactly and preciſely, with the Being we have ſuppoſed uncapable of feeling either Pleaſure or Pain.

3. Now hence it follows, that no Conſiderations beſides thoſe of Pleaſure and Pain, Happineſs or Miſery, regarded as the neceſſary or likely, or at leaſt not impoſſible Conſequence of a Man's acting or forbearing to act, can be any Reaſons or Motives at all to him to act or forbear, as being not by Nature fitted to move or work upon him at all. Agreeably to this, whoever goes about to reaſon or perſwade another to any kind of Action or Forbearance whatever, conſtantly does it by Motives of Intereſt, Pleaſure, Satisfaction of one kind or other, preſent or future, as being well apprized by natural Inſtinct and inward Experience, that all other Conſiderations whatever are abſolutely impertinent, and ſignify nothing at all, as what can no more move the Mind, than a Mite can a Millſtone. Nay, even the Almighty himſelf ſeems to have no other Way of Bending a free Agent, whilſt he continues ſuch, to a Compliance with his Will, than by offering to his Conſideration for that Purpoſe, Motives of Self-Intereſt, preſent or future. His Language throughout the Old and New Teſtament is, do this and live, do that and die;

do thus and be happy, do otherwiſe and be miſerable. Which way of Proceeding with Mankind manifeſtly implies, that Happineſs is their chief End, what they muſt and cannot help purſuing, as being that, wherein all the Deſires, Inclinations and Movements of the Mind of Man, terminate, beyond which they can not go, and ſhort of which they can not reſt.

4. If no Conſiderations but thoſe of Pleaſure and Pain, can be any Reaſons for, or Motives to Action or Forbearance, even where no Pain of any Kind is apprehended or imagin'd likely, or ſo much as poſſible, to follow from the Action or Forbearance adviſed to; it is yet more apparent, if poſſible, that they cannot be ſuch, where Pain and Miſery, great Miſery is apprehended, not only as the poſſible or likely, but the ſure and certain Conſequence of ſuch Action or Forbearance. This can not be denied, unleſs any one will pretend to ſay, that Miſery, pure Mifery, is a proper Object of Choice, can excite an Inclination, or give a Diſpoſition to the Purſuit of it: Which I preſume no Man well in his Wits will ſay, ſince the thing is viſibly as impoſſible as any thing in Nature beſides can be. In ſhort it muſt appear very evident to any one, that will but be at the Pains of a little Reflection, that nothing can be a Reaſon or Motive ſufficient to incline the Mind to ſubmit to Pain, but the Conſideration or Apprehenſion of it, as a neceſſary or likely, or at leaſt not an impoſſible Means to avoid a greater, or procure ſome over-

over-ballancing Pleaſure, ſome Pleaſure judged worth the purchaſing at that Rate. And I preſume to add, that for any one to deny, directly and *ex animo* to deny a thing ſo very plain, muſt proceed from ſomething worſe than Weakneſs and bare Miſtake, even downright Perverſeneſs, and a wilful ſhutting the Eyes of his Mind againſt the moſt glaring Light of Evidence.

Let us now apply what has been ſaid to our Author's Definition of *Virtue*, and ſee how it will ſtand the Tryal. *Virtue*, ſays he, *conſiſts in the Conformity of Actions, to the Reaſons of Things*, &c. I ſuppoſe He will allow what Dr. *Clarke* ſays, and all the World beſides are ſenſible of, that Virtue is often threatened with great Calamities and Loſſes, and ſometimes even with Death itſelf. Now in this Caſe it is plain by Article the 4th above, that no Conſiderations whatever, which the Nature of Things can poſſibly ſuggeſt, can be any Reaſon or Motive to the Practice of Virtue at all, ſince all the Reaſon or Motive ariſing from the Nature of Things, excluſive of the Will of God, and a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments, is a Motive to the Practice of the contrary. Vice in this Caſe is acting in Conformity to the Reaſon of Things, ſo that *Vice* will here be *Virtue*, according to our Author's Definition of it.

In ſhort, I ſay, it is undeniable, that the Practice of Virtue is ſometimes attended with great Miſery; in which Caſe, upon the Suppoſition of no future State of Rewards or Puniſhments, there can be no Reaſon ariſing from the Nature

ture of Things for the ſaid Practice, unleſs there be any thing in Nature more eligible than Happineſs, any Reaſon or Motive ſufficient to induce the Mind to chooſe Miſery, pure and abſolute Miſery. If there is any ſuch thing, any ſuch Reaſon or Motive, our Author would do well to tell us in plain Engliſh what it is. I am ſure the Support and Defence of his Doctrine viſibly require this from him, if he can do it; and if he cannot, whether Ingenuity and Honeſty do not as viſibly require a frank Acknowledgment that he cannot, I leave the World to judge.

I might now take Leave of him, as having, I think, ſufficiently confuted his Doctrine of Virtue and Moral Obligation; but as I have promiſed a thorough Examination of every thing he has advanced for the Support of it, I ſhall proceed to diſcuſs every Tittle of what he has ſaid for that Purpoſe in the 6 or 7 Pages following, in order to ſhew it to be all of a Piece, all equally wide of the Truth, or unintelligible.

In the next Paragraph he tells us, '*Moral 'Duties are ſuch Acts as we are obliged to ex-'ert in Conformity to the Reaſons of Things*'; and adds, '*Gratitude*, e. g. *is a moral Duty*: '*We cannot but perceive an Agreement in the 'Ideas of Gratitude and Kindneſs received.*' This Perception then it ſeems, according to our Author, is the Foundation of our Obligation to Gratitude, or the Reaſon why Men ought to be grateful for Kindneſſes received: for 'tis here alledged, as a Reaſon why Gratitude ought to be looked upon as a moral Duty. The

Agreement

Agreement of Ideas is a Phraſe borrowed from Mr. *Locke*, in whoſe Way of uſing it, it is clear and intelligible; but what our Author means by it, if he had any Meaning at all, is very hard, I fear, if not impoſſible to gueſs. The Agreement of Ideas, according to Mr. *Locke*, is reducible to four Sorts, viz. 1. That of Identity. 2. Relation. 3. Coexiſtence, or neceſſary Connection. 4. Real Exiſtence. The firſt and two laſt can have no Place here, as is evident to ſuch as underſtand the Meaning of the Terms. Thoſe that do not, may have Recourſe to Mr. LOCKE's *Eſſay upon Human Underſtanding* for Satisfaction. This Agreement then betwixt the Ideas of Gratitude and Kindneſs received muſt be an Agreement of *Relation*; and if ſo, our Author is ſtrangely overſeen, very ſhort, I think, to leave Things ſo much in the Dark, as he has done, by not ſpecifying that *Relation*, that we might judge for our ſelves, how the Perception of that *Relation*, can make Gratitude a Moral Duty, or lay an Obligation upon Men to the conſtant Practice thereof; ſince that is the End for which the Perception of this Agreement betwixt the Ideas of Gratitude and Kindneſs received is here introduced. For my part, I can think of no Relation attached to thoſe Ideas, no Relation of Gratitude to Kindneſs, but that of an *Effect* to its *Cauſe*, which yet belongs not to the Ideas conſidered by themſelves, (ſince there is no univerſal inſeperable Connexion of that kind betwixt Gratitude and Kindneſs received) but only

only in Conjunction with the Idea of a certain Diſpoſition of Mind in the Perſon who receives the Kindneſs, neceſſary in order to its making that Impreſſion, or having that Effect upon him; that is, in plainer Engliſh, we find Gratitude to be the natural Product of Kindneſs received, in Minds, whoſe natural Reliſh has not been vitiated by an Indulgence of ill-natur'd Paſſions. Well then, let us ſuppoſe this to be the Relation meant, 'till our Author acquaints us with ſome other, and ſee how it will do the Work it is here deſigned for. The Argument ſtands thus. Gratitude is generally the Effect of Kindneſs received, therefore it is a moral Duty. And Lewdneſs, ſay I, is generally the Effect of keeping lewd Company, therefore that is a moral Duty too. Both theſe Arguments are equally good, that is to ſay, good for nothing, and therefore I preſume our Author cannot mean that Relation. If he has any other in Store he thinks will do his Buſineſs here, and pleaſes to produce it, it ſhall have a fair Trial. But perhaps he may as well ſave himſelf that Trouble, becauſe it looks like a palpable Abſurdity to talk of Relations of Ideas, foreign to the procuring of Happineſs, or the avoiding of Miſery more or leſs (which alone can ſerve his Purpoſe) being the Foundation of Obligation, or any Reaſon for or Motive to Action or Forbearance. No Relation can be ſuch Foundation or Reaſon, but that which Perſons and Things, or Actions employed about them, have to us as a Means to procure Happineſs, or avoid Miſery more or leſs,

leſs, by the Production, or ſecuring the Enjoyment, of Pleaſure, or by guarding againſt, or delivering us from Pain, as is plain from the ſecond Article above. All other Conſiderations, call them *Relations*, *Reaſons*, *Congruity*, *Fitneſs* or *Agreement* of Ideas, or by what other fine Names you will, manifeſtly ſignify nothing at all to the Purpoſe.

A little lower our Author endeavours to explain this myſterious *Agreement* of Ideas, by the *Congruity* or *Fitneſs* of Ideas, Terms yet rather more remote from all Appearance of Meaning, than that which they are made uſe of to explain. But as his Deſign here is to defend Dr. *Clarke*'s Doctrine about the Foundation of Morality, it is preſumable he means no more by his *Congruity* and *Fitneſs* of Ideas, than what that learned Gentleman meant by his *Fitneſs* in Things themſelves, the *Fitneſs* of the Application of different Things, or different Relations to one another, with other ſuch like Language; and that the Doctor meant indeed nothing thereby, but only amuſed himſelf and his Readers with a Parcel of empty inſignificant Words, muſt appear, I think, to any one that reads him attentively, and without Prejudice.

But that our Author may not think himſelf ſlighted, and to give him all poſſible fair Play, let us make the beſt we can of this ſame *Congruity* or *Fitneſs* of Ideas he talks of, by ſuppoſing he means in the Inſtance before us (that of Gratitude) that there is a *Fitneſs* in the Practice thereof, or that it is *fit* to be practiced. Now *fit* and *fitneſs* are relative Terms: No Ac-

tion, no Practice, or Conduct, can be ſaid to be *fit* abſolutely, but with Reference to ſome End. I aſk therefore, when the Practice of Gratitude is ſaid to be fit, for what is it fit? Is it fit to promote the private Good of the Practicer, by yielding him a Delight naturally and immediately ariſing from the Practice thereof, as alſo by the procuring of further Kindneſſes from a Benefactor, and other Advantages in this Life and a future? Yes, there is a Fitneſs in the Practice of Gratitude to all the ſeveral Purpoſes mentioned; but then this cannot be the Fitneſs intended by our Author, becauſe Gratitude, as well as all other Virtues, according to his Doctrine, are obligatory, independently upon any Conſiderations of private Intereſt or Advantage of any kind, and would be conſtantly and eternally ſo, even tho' there was no Advantage whatever to be had by them, in this Life or a future; nay, tho' the utmoſt Miſery was to attend the Practice. What then ſhall we ſay to this ſame Fitneſs, or what ſhall we make of it? Is it a Fitneſs to promote the Good of others, the Good of Benefactors? There is indeed ſuch a Fitneſs as this likewiſe in the Practice of Gratitude, but which will no more ſerve any Purpoſe of our Author's than the former. For ſuch a Fitneſs, unleſs where the Good of others is apprehended as a Means of ſome way or other promoting our own (in which Caſe it falls in with that Sort of Fitneſs firſt mentioned and ſet aſide) can not be any Foundation of Obligation, any Reaſon for, or Motive to, the Practice of Virtue at all, even

even where no Harm is apprehended to follow from it at all, as is evident from Article the 3d above; but ſtill leſs ſo, if poſſible, where Miſchief or Miſery is apprehended to be the Conſequence, by Article the 4th.

If therefore this pretended *Fitneſs* in things themſelves, ſo much talkt of, this *Fitneſs* in the Practice of Virtue, alledged for the Ground and Original of Moral Obligation, independent upon the Divine Will or Law, be neither a Fitneſs to promote the private Good of the Practicer, which our Author will not pretend it is, as being utterly inconſiſtent with his own Doctrine; nor yet a Fitneſs to promote the good of others, ſince it has been evidently ſhewn, that ſuch a Fitneſs alone cannot be the Foundation of Obligation, can be no Reaſon for, or Motive to, the Practice of Virtue at all: I ſay if the Fitneſs ſo much talkt of for the Purpoſe above mentioned be neither of theſe, it is like to paſs, for ought I can ſee, for nothing but a Word without meaning, 'till our Author, or ſome Body elſe for him, ſhall be pleaſed to aſſign one that will ſerve the Purpoſe, which if it could be done, would have been done before now, I dare ſay, by another Hand. Such a thing was promiſed by the Gentleman I mean, whom it highly concern'd both in point of Honour, and Regard to Truth, to perform his Promiſe, had he found it practicable, but he never did.

Our Author proceeds in the next Page to explain that important Term *Obligation*, and

what he has to that Purpoſe is as follows. *There is an Agreement of ſome Ideas, which is eaſily perceived : and there is a manifeſt Diſagreement in others ; in others ſtill there is no manner of Relation at all. Now wherever any Creature is made capable of perceiving a real Agreement or Diſagreement, and becomes conſcious of the Relations or Circumſtances of Things, if he acts contrary to ſuch Perception, he acts contrary to the End, for which ſuch a Power of Perception was given him. Reaſon is that Power by which we perceive the ſeveral Relations of Things : to act inconſiſtent with Reaſon, is to act contrary to the End, for which ſuch a Faculty was given us.* Obligation *therefore ſignifies that TIE we have upon us, to act agreeably to thoſe Faculties or Powers, which we are veſted with by God.*

By the Illative Conjunction *therefore*, with which our Author uſhers in his Definition of *Obligation*, it's evident he makes it a Conſequence from what was ſaid in the Lines foregoing. Thoſe are the Premiſes, and this the Concluſion of an Argument, to ſhew the ſtrict and preciſe Meaning of the Term *Obligation*, in the philoſophical Uſe and Acceptation of it. Let us put therefore our Author's Reaſoning into the Form of a Syllogiſm, and ſee how it will look. Thus it runs then. If Men in acting inconſiſtent with Reaſon, act contrary to the End, for which ſuch a Faculty was given us, then the Term *Obligation* muſt ſignify that

that TIE we have upon us to act agreeably to thoſe Faculties or Powers which we are veſted with by God. But the former is true; therefore the Term *Obligation* is rightly defined, *i. e.* agreeably to the common Uſe of it in the Doctrine of Morals. If the Conſequence of his major Propoſition be deny'd him, I doubt he will be ſomewhat puzzled to make it good; and therefore I ſhall not deſire it of him, as ſuppoſing, when he has thought better of the Matter, he will never pretend to it, for the plain Reaſon following. Uſe is the only Rule of Language, and the Juſtneſs or Propriety of the Definition of any Term whatever, is no other ways to be made out, than by an Appeal to that Rule. And therefore our Author's Proceeding is viſibly wide of the Purpoſe. For let it be ever ſo true, that acting inconſiſtent with Reaſon is acting contrary to the End, for which ſuch a Faculty was given us, how can that direct us to the true Senſe of the Word *Obligation*, or ſhew what is properly meant by it, any more than what is meant by any other Word in the Engliſh Tongue? The Query is, What Idea the Word *Obligation* ſtands for amongſt the Writers of Moral Philoſophy. They mean by it, ſays our Author, *that TIE we have upon us to act agreeably to thoſe Faculties or Powers, which we are veſted with by God?* How does that appear? From hence ſays he, that *to act inconſiſtent with Reaſon is to act contrary to the End, for which ſuch a Faculty was given us by God.* Now ſuppoſing this Reaſon to be intelligible, which it is not (for the Phraſe of acting inconſiſtent

ſtent with Reaſon, in his Uſe of it, has no Meaning at all, as has been ſhewn by Mr. *Hutcheſon)* but ſuppoſe I ſay this Reaſon to be both Senſe and Truth, and let it ſignify what it will, yet it can ſignify nothing at all to the purpoſe; becauſe the only way to juſtify his Definition, was to quote the moſt celebrated Authors in Moral Philoſophy, and thereby ſhew it to be the ſame with what they themſelves have laid down: But this could not be done, I believe; at leaſt they, none of them, that I remember, define *Obligation* in ſo abſurd a Manner; for that our Author's Definition is abſurd, I come now in the next Place to ſhew.

Obligation, ſays he, *is that TIE we have upon us to act agreeably to thoſe Faculties or Powers we are veſted with by God.*' What means he by the Word *TIE* here, I would gladly be inform'd, if he means any Thing by it different from what he means by Obligation, if he has any meaning in either; for *Tie* in ſuch a Figurative Way of uſing the Word, can Signify nothing, that I ſee, but exactly and preciſely the very ſame with *Obligation*. His Way of defining then is only putting one Synonymous Word for another, never a Whit more clear and intelligible than that it is deſign'd to explain, and amounts in Effect to no more than this, that *Obligation is Obligation*, or *I know not what*. I appeal to the Reader whether he can make any Better Stuff of this Definition of our Author's. It lies therefore ſtill upon him to ſhew, what he can mean conſiſtently with his Doctrine

of

of the Foundation of Morality, by that *Obligation* or *Tie* he pretends we are under from the Nature of Things, excluſive of the Divine command, to the conſtant uniform Practice of Virtue, even in Caſes where the ſaid Practice is attended with great Miſery; for the Word *Obligation* or *Tie* in this Caſe, ſeems to have no Meaning at all. Can a Man be ſaid to be Tied or Obliged to Act or behave ſo or ſo, when he is not only at full Liberty to behave otherwiſe, but is really tied and obliged to behave otherwiſe, by the only ſort of Ties or Obligations the Mind of a Free Agent can be under, the Conſiderations of Happineſs and Miſery. If our Author knows of any Thing elſe that can lay a ſtronger Tie or Obligation upon the Mind, or indeed any at all, I wiſh he would produce it, that every Man by a ſtrict Scrutiny into the Springs of Action within his own Soul, may judge whether it be really ſuch. Where the Practice of Virtue becomes inconſiſtent with a Man's preſent Intereſt or Happineſs, when all regard to Divine Law, and conſequently to Future Rewards and Puniſhments is ſet aſide, he ſeems juſt as much tied and obliged to it by the Nature of Things, as a Man is Tied and Obliged to run out of Jayl, when he is kept cloſe confined there, loadened with Irons, and chained down to the Floor. No Man can be tied or obliged to Impoſſibilities, amongſt which may be reckoned, the chooſing to be miſerable for nothing, chuſing pure and abſolute Miſery, Miſery as ſuch; which no Body ever thought a proper Object of Choice, and what Men were under an Obligation

Obligation from the Nature of Things to chooſe, 'till that notable Diſcovery was made by ſome Modern Dealers in Morality.

Again, what is the Meaning of *acting according to Faculties or Powers*, which we are veſted with by God? I underſtand what it is to act according to a *Law* or a *Rule*, or what, by Virtue of its cloſe Connexion with a *Law* or a *Rule*, is put for either, as acting according to *Reaſons*, *Motives*, the *Will* or *Deſire* of another. This Language, I ſay, is intelligible, and juſtified by common Uſe. But to talk of acting agreeably to *Faculties* or *Powers*, natural Faculties or Powers, is, if I miſtake not, much ſuch Senſe, and juſt as proper Language, as it would be to talk of acting agreeably to an *Oak-Tree*, or a *Horſe-Shoe*. Perhaps the Author meant no more by this new Language, than the Reverſe of what he had expreſſed before, by the Phraſe of *acting contrary to the End for which the Faculty of Reaſon was given us*: But then it may appear ſtrange he ſhould not keep to that or the like Language, rather than inſert ſuch a Piece of Abſurdity in a Definition, which requires the plaineſt Language. But that I ſhall account for preſently. The Expreſſion of *acting agreeably to the End, for which the Faculty of Reaſon was given us*, would have been proper intelligible Language: But to talk of acting agreeably to *Faculties*, is I think not ſo. He that goes religiouſly to hear a Sermon, acts agreeably to the End, for which the Faculty of hearing was given him, and it is proper enough to ſay ſo. But it is, I conceive, no very

very good Senſe to ſay, he acts agreeably to the *Faculty of Hearing*. As on the contrary, he that goes to ſee and hear lewd Plays, or ſuch Stuff as the *Beggar's Opera* acted, may be properly and truely ſaid to act contrary to the End for which God gave him the Faculties of Seeing and Hearing; but it would be Nonſenſe, I preſume, to ſay he acted contrary to the Faculties of Seeing and Hearing.

It may ſeem as I have already ſaid, at firſt Sight ſomewhat ſtrange to the Reader, that our Author ſhould not avoid this Abſurdity in his Definition, by keeping to the Language of the Premiſes, from which he infers it: for having there told us, that *to act inconſiſtent with Reaſon, is to act contrary to the End for which ſuch a Faculty was given us*, and having told us this, in order to deduce from thence the proper Meaning of the Word *Obligation*, it is natural for the Reader to expect the like Language in the Definition; but that would not ſerve his Purpoſe: for had he defined *Obligation* to be the Tie we have upon us to Act agreeably to the End for which the Faculty of Reaſon was given us by God; that would have look'd like owning the Riſe of Obligation to be from the Law of God, the very thing he was going to confute. For *to act agreeably to the End for which the Faculty of Reaſon was given us by God*, and *to act agreeably to his Law*, are the ſame thing: thoſe two Expreſſions are but different Ways of wording the ſame Senſe. For if God gave Men the Faculty of Reaſon for a certain End,

which he expected they ſhould purſue, it's plain he muſt have given them ſufficient Intimation of it; that is, he muſt have given them a Law, for their uſing it agreeably to the Deſign he had in beſtowing it. The putting then that Language into his Definition of *Obligation*, could not have been at all pertinent to his Deſign of ſhewing moral Obligation, to be in Nature previous to the divine Law, and independent thereon, but to Appearance inconſiſtent therewith, or at beſt abſolutely impertinent. There was therefore a viſible Neceſſity of quitting that Language; but then Mention having been made of the *Faculty* of Reaſon, and the *Power* of perceiving, in the Diſcourſe previous to, and deſign'd to introduce and juſtify his Definition of *Obligation*, he thought his Concluſion would look too wide of his Premiſes, if thoſe Words were not in it, and has accordingly retained them, tho' in a Way that has helped to ſpoil his Definition quite, by making meer Jargon of it.

Moral Virtue, ſays he, *conſiſts in the Conformity of our Actions to the Relations or Reaſons of Things; and therefore this muſt be obligatory to all intelligent Beings, even previous to any Laws, or Commands, or Injunctions divine or humane.* Anſwer. Let Men uſe Words as they pleaſe, that does not affect the Nature of Things, and therefore no ſuch Conſequence can follow from the Definition of *Virtue*, as our Author pretends to draw from it, even ſuppoſing it to be intelligible and right (which it is not) and the

Word

Word *Obligatory* to have a Meaning, (which here it has not) and to import the Reality of a ſufficient Reaſon for, or Motive to, ſuch an unintelligible Conformity of Actions to the Relations and Reaſons of Things, as is here talk'd of. And this is all the Anſwer that is neceſſary, 'till our Author pleaſes to explain what he means by the *Conformity of Actions to the Relations and Reaſons of Things*, as alſo by the Term *Obligation*. I ſhall only add, that the Account here given of the Riſe of *Obligation* (whatever be meant by that Word, if it has any Meaning in our Author's Uſe of it) is very different from what he gives us, *Pag.* 7. There it is derived from the Perception Men have of the *Agreement* or *Diſagreement* of Ideas: Here it is fetched from the Meaning of the Word *Virtue*. There the Reaſon given, why Men are obliged to the Practice of Moral Duties, is, becauſe they muſt perceive an *Agreement* or *Diſagreement* in certain Ideas; here it is, becauſe the Word *Virtue* is uſed, as our Author will have it, to ſignify a Conformity of Actions to the Relations or Reaſons of Things. The firſt Account or Reaſon is wrapped up in a thick impenetrable Miſt of philoſophical Profundity. The latter, tho' pretty deeply involved in thick Miſt, yet is not ſo far gone therein, but that the Abſurdity thereof is apparent enough, let what will be meant by *Obligation*; for the Uſe of Words, as I have already taken Notice, can not affect the Nature of Things; if it could, the latter would vary with the former, and ſo Men by changing the

Signification of the Term *Virtue*, would deliver themſelves from all Obligation to the Practice of what is now meant by it. For if the only Reaſon why Men are obliged to the Practice of Virtue, be, as our Author here ſays, becauſe the Word *Virtue* is uſed by them in the Senſe here aſſigned, it is but altering that Senſe of the Word, and agreeing to uſe it for ſomething elſe, and then the Reaſon ceaſes, and conſequently all Obligation depending thereupon vaniſhes at the ſame time. Such ſtrange Abſurdities muſt Men, even of ſtrong Parts and great Learning, run themſelves upon, in their reaſoning upon Subjects of any Difficulty, if they will not attend to the Language they make uſe of; and take Care to talk intelligibly.

The Relations of Things, ſays our Author, *are certain, fixt, and unchangeable.* Anſw. The Relations of general abſtract Ideas are inſeparable from thoſe Ideas, and ſo are as *certain*, *fixt*, and *unchangeable*, as the Ideas themſelves; but the Relations of Things exiſting in Conformity to thoſe Ideas, are far from being *certain*, *fix'd*, and *unchangeable*; becauſe they depend upon the Exiſtence of Things themſelves, or the Manner and Circumſtances of their Exiſtence; neither of which are *certain*, *fixt*, and *unchangeable*: The former is dependent upon the Will of God, and the latter are liable to Alteration from a variety of Natural Cauſes.

The Relations of Things, adds the Author, *are of that Nature, that God himſelf is ſo far Subject to them, that he cannot but act according to them.*' To talk of God's being at all,

all, or to any degree ſubject to any Thing, is, in my Opinion, no very decent Language. Well, but he cannot Act but according to the Relations of Things. Be it ſo, what then? Will it follow that God can be properly ſaid to be *obliged* to act ſo? If it will, then according to our Author, the proper Notion of *Obligation*, muſt be that of an *abſolute Neceſſity* of acting according to the Relations of things; and if ſo, it's certain Mankind can lie under no Obligation at all to act according to them, becauſe they are under no ſuch abſolute Neceſſity at all, they not only can, but do act otherwiſe. And thus our Author has at laſt made a fine Spot of Work of it indeed, by diſcharging Mankind entirely from all Obligation to the Practice of Virtue, and ſo demoliſhing all Morality at once.

If He (God) *were to act contrary to them* (the Relations of things) *He would act contrary* Right *and* Truth, *i. e. He would act unreaſonably.* When our Author has explained what he means here by *Right* and *Truth* and acting *contrary* to them, it will be time enough to give him a direct and diſtinct Anſwer. But before he attempts that Explication, I would adviſe him to conſult Mr. *Hutcheſon*'s Book upon the *Paſſions*, by which perhaps he may be convinced, ſuch Language is never to be explained in a Manner that can be of any Service to his Cauſe; for that Gentleman has, in my Judgement, demonſtratively ſhewn ſuch a Way of Talking,

ing, as it is uſed by the Followers of the Scheme our Author is engaged in the Defence of, to be mere Jargon.

After a Quotation out of the Author of the Remarks, p. 9. our Author adds the following Words. *That Things may be uſeful or hurtful previous to any Law is here granted; nor will it be denyed, I gueſs, that it does not depend upon any Law, that two and two make four. This Sort of Relations had been the ſame, ſuppoſing that God had never created any Beings whatever. Now juſt in the ſame manner, the Relations of moral Acts to one another, are as neceſſary as the Relations of Natural Acts.* By *Things* it's evident the Author of the *Remarks* means *Human Actions:* theſe he ſays may be *naturally* good or bad, *materially* good or evil, *i. e.* uſeful or hurtful, previous to any Law; but they cannot be *formally* and *morally* good or evil, without reſpect to ſome Law. To this the Reply is, that *the Relations of Moral Acts to one another, are as neceſſary as the Relations of natural Acts*, or *as the Relation betwixt twice two and four*; a very notable Inſtance to be ſure of a Couple of natural Acts: That Numbers are natural Acts, is, I think, a very new and extraordinary Diſcovery. I wiſh he would explain a little what he means by the *Relations of Moral Acts to one another*, and ſhew the Pertinency thereof for the Purpoſe it is here applied to, *viz.* The ſhewing that Actions may be morally good or evil, without reſpect to any Law; for the Relation of moral Acts to one another, is not even according to his own Scheme; what

makes

makes the Actions morally good or evil, but the Relation thoſe Acts have to a certain End, as a Means to effect it, a Fitneſs to promote the Happineſs of Mankind, or the contrary. 'Tis this, I ſay, according to the very Scheme he has undertaken to defend, that, the Moral Good or Evil of Human Actions muſt conſiſt in, or nothing; and therefore to what Purpoſe of his, this Talk of the Relation of Moral and Natural Acts to one another is, I ſee not, and deſire him to make out, if he can.

It is not a divine Law, ſays our Author, *that conſtitutes Moral, Good or Evil, but ſomething antecedent to any Divine Law, even the Relations of Things to one another.* Anſw. It will be, I ſuppoſe, univerſally allowed, that by *Actions Morally Good* are meant ſuch Actions as Men are under a conſtant Obligation to practice, and by *Actions Morally Evil*, ſuch as Men are under a conſtant Obligation to forbear. Now Men, I ſay, can be under no ſuch conſtant Obligation to practice the one, and forbear the other, in any Senſe the Word ever has in the Engliſh Tongue, but by Virtue of a Divine Law, enforced with a Sanction of future Rewards and Puniſhments, and conſequently it is ſuch a Law, and that only, which conſtitutes Actions Morally Good or Evil. But if our Author ſtill perſiſts in maintaining the contrary, I requeſt of him to make Senſe of his Doctrine, by defining the Term *Obligation* over again, and applying it to the Caſe in Hand. If this cannot be effectually done, as I am pretty ſure it cannot, and almoſt as ſure

it

it will never be attempted, it will be in vain to make any further Noiſe and Buſtle with a Word, that, in our Author's Way of uſing it, viſibly has no Meaning.

All Law, ſays he, *muſt be founded upon theſe Relations, which are previous to it.* That the divine Law is founded in a previous Fitneſs in Things or Actions to produce Pleaſure or Pain, Happineſs or Miſery, if that be all he drives at, will be allowed him ; but that ſuch a previous Fitneſs will lay Mankind under an Obligation to the conſtant Practice of Virtue, even in Caſes where the ſaid Practice is threatened, as Dr. *Clarke* words it, with great Calamities and Loſſes, nay Death itſelf, is denied him, and ever will, 'till he ſhews us, what he means by the Word *Obligation*, in ſo ſtrange a Way of applying it, and that it is not only *Practicable*, but likewiſe *Fit* and *Reaſonable* for Men to make themſelves Miſerable for nothing, to chooſe the Extremity of Pain and Miſery, without the Proſpect of the leaſt future Benefit to be received thereby. Thoſe that have a Mind to ſee the Subject of this Paragraph diſcourſed of at large, may be pleaſed to conſult my *Foundation of Morality* for it.

Conſequently, adds our Author, *all Law muſt be no more than a Command to obſerve, or to take heed not to tranſgreſs theſe Relations.* To tranſgreſs Relations is a new Sort of Language peculiar to our Author, as I take it, and quite beyond the Comprehenſion of vulgar Capacities, ſuch as mine however.

He aſks, p. 11. *Why God always acts according to theſe Relations?* Dropping the learn'd Term *Relations*, I anſwer, that God acts according to Rules of Juſtice and Goodneſs, becauſe that Manner of Action is in itſelf agreeable to him, he takes a Satisfaction, a real Delight in ſo acting, and is infinitely out of the Reach of all Pain and Miſery, or any the leaſt ill Conſequence from it. And if our Author has a Mind to call this the *Obligation* the great God is under to the Practice of Juſtice and Goodneſs, in his Conduct towards his Creatures, I ſhall not pretend to wrangle with him about it, tho' I think the Application of that Word to God, is better let alone, becauſe it has generally, if not always indeed, in the Doctrine of Morals, amongſt thoſe that know what they ſay, attached to it the Ideas of Law, and a Superiour. But let us now attend to the Uſe our Author makes of this conſtant Adherence of the Divine Being to the Rules of Juſtice and Goodneſs. His Reaſoning is this, ſince God who is ſubject to no Law acts thus; *Moral Good and Evil is founded upon an Agreement of Relations previous to any Declaration of any one's Will, and conſequently is obligatory, ſuppoſing no Law at all were given.* Which is in Effect the ſame as to ſay, that becauſe God Almighty, who takes a Pleaſure in the Practice of Juſtice and Goodneſs, and can not poſſibly ſuffer the leaſt Inconvenience from it, conſtantly perſiſts therein; therefore Men, poor, frail, weak Creatures, frequently liable by the Practice of Virtue to ſuffer the moſt diſmal Calamities, are likewiſe obliged notwithſtanding to adhere

ſtedfaſtly to the ſaid Practice, under the utmoſt Extremity and Miſery imaginable, even to Death it ſelf; tho' they were abſolutely certain, they ſhould receive no future Reward or Compenſation for ſo doing. Does not the Vanity as well as the Weakneſs of ſuch a Way of arguing ſtare the Reader in the Face? Shall Man preſume to put himſelf in this Caſe upon a Level with the MOST HIGH, or aſpire rather to a Superiority above HIM? For ſuch extravagant Pretenſions to Power and Ability in the Practice of Virtue, ſeem to ſoar above Almighty Power itſelf. For if the Practice of Juſtice and Goodneſs could be ſuppoſed upon any Account in the leaſt offenſive or diſagreeable to God, I humbly preſume to ſay, we could have no Reaſon that I can ſee, to expect the Practice of them from him at all. For why ſhould a Being that has all Power in his Hands, and has nothing to fear, diſturb his own Repoſe, by acting in a way that would be diſpleaſing to him?

What has miſled our Author to judge amiſs of the Foundation of Morality, as it has a great many more, and Dr. *Clarke* in particular, is the over-looking the true cauſe of God Almighty's ſteddy Adherence to Truth, Juſtice, and Goodneſs, viz. the *Pleaſure*, the *Delight* he takes therein; and imputing it to, I know not what *Relations*, *Reaſons*, *Differences*, *Reſpects* and *Proportions* of Things, all Words without meaning, if any more is meant by them, than the Relation that Things or Actions have to us as a means fit for the producing Pleaſure or Pain, Happineſs or Miſery; and

and if this be all meant by them, ſuch an appearance of huge Profundity, ſo pompous a variety of myſtical Terms, might as well have been ſpared, I think, and plain intelligible Language uſed. 'Tis not a bare regard to the *Relations*, *Reſpects*, *Proportions* or *Eternal Differences* of Things that determines the Almighty to the conſtant practice of Juſtice and Goodneſs, nothing like it, but the Pleaſure he takes in doing good to his Creatures, the Delight he takes in providing for their preſent Happineſs here, ſo far as is conſiſtent with their being in a ſtate of Tryal, and their unconceiveable and endleſs Happineſs hereafter, if they will but qualify themſelves for it, by a dutyfull Behaviour towards him in this Life. It is this I preſume to ſay, that weighs with the Almighty, and not a regard to *Fitneſſes*, *Relations*, *Proportions*, &c. He ſees indeed the *Relation* that a certain manner of Behaviour toward his Creatures has to their Happineſs, as a means proper to promote it; but ſuch a Sight, ſuch a View, I humbly preſume to ſay, could not move him at all, did he not take a Delight in the End, for which he ſees ſuch a means to be proper. The not attending to this, has given Occaſion to a great many, to imagine I know not what binding Force in the bare Perception of what they call *Relations* and *Reaſons* of Things, *Fitneſſes*, *Proportions*, &c. tho' to this Day, they have never been able to explain themſelves, or make any Senſe at all of the Word *Obligation*, in their Way of applying it, and I preſume to ſay, never will.

It is natural upon this Occaſion to aſk theſe Gentlemen, that are for eſtabliſhing Morality in the World, without deriving the conſtant Obligation to the Practice of it from God, why theſe ſame *Reaſons* and *Relations* of Things, which alone, according to their Doctrine, determine the Almighty to act according to them, as they word it, do not likewiſe determine Men with the ſame Steddineſs and Conſtancy, if they have any ſuch binding Quality, ſuch obliging Force in them as is pretended. Ignorance of theſe *Relations* or *Reaſons* cannot be alledged, becauſe, if nothing more be meant by thoſe learned Terms, than only the *Fitneſs* of the Practice of Virtue to promote the Good of thoſe the righteous Man has to do with, the moſt ſtupid and vicious are ſenſible enough of that *Fitneſs*, that *Tendency*; at leaſt Juſtice, Generoſity, and Humanity, are too obviouſly beneficial to the World about a Man endued with thoſe Qualities, not to be taken Notice of as ſuch, by the moſt ſtupid and vicious, in whom for that Reaſon they oftentimes produce an inward Eſteem and Veneration at leaſt, if they do not extort an outward Reſpect for the Perſon poſſeſſed of them. I leave our Author to conſider of, and anſwer the Queſtion above, if he can, in a way that will not be prejudicial to his Cauſe.

The Truth is, upon the ſtricteſt Search and Enquiry into Human Nature, it will be found, that nothing but the Conſiderations of Pleaſure and Pain can move or determine the Mind at all. Thoſe alone are the Objects of all its Care and Concern; and to pretend that Mankind can be

be concern'd about any thing elſe, is a moſt apparent Contradiction. The Fitneſs of Virtue therefore to promote the publick Happineſs, ſeparate from all Conſideration of it as a Means to promote the private Good of the Practicer, in any way or kind whatever, can not poſſibly move, determine, or diſpoſe the Mind of Man to the Practice of Virtue at all; which having been ſufficiently made out above, is, with what has been ſaid in the three laſt Paragraphs, enough by way of Anſwer to our Author's Argument for his Doctrine, fetched from the Conſideration of God's conſtant Adherence to the Rules of Juſtice and Goodneſs, tho' he be above all Law.

After a Quotation from the Author of the Remarks, wherein *Obligation* is reſolved into the Force of divine Law, our Author proceeds thus p. 12. *Here it is affirmed that all Obligation is reſolved into ſome Law, and is declared to be a Contradiction and flat Abſurdity, if conſidered as antecedent to all Law, ſince then by Suppoſition, it is a divine Law which conſtitutes an Action morally good, and gives it both the Name and Nature of Virtue, the Conſequence is, that it was the Arbitrary Will of God, whether even Vice with all its Deformities, might not have been equally valued by him as Virtue is. Had God commanded Men to be unjuſt or ungrateful, it would have been morally good to be unjuſt and ungrateful; and it only depended upon his good Pleaſure, whether he would give us the preſent Law, ſince he might as well have given us the direct contrary.* This ſtrange Piece of Argumentation ſhews evidently, that

I gueſs'd right above at the cauſe of all his Wandring, his wandring ſo wide of the real Foundation of Morality, viz. his overlooking the true cauſe of God Almighty's conſtant adherence to Juſtice and Goodneſs, which is the Pleaſure and Delight he takes, neceſſarily and eſſentially takes therein. Virtue is from the very Nature and Eſſence of God agreeable and well pleaſing to him, Vice the contrary. Nor is this at all inconſiſtent with reſolving all Obligation into the Force of divine Law, as has been above ſhewn. Let it be never ſo true, that Mankind cannot be under a conſtant Obligation to the practice of Virtue, but from a divine Law, it can never follow from thence, that Virtue and Vice were Originally in their own Nature, matters of meer indifferency with God, and that the Agreeableneſs of the former, and Diſagreeableneſs of the latter to him were the effect of an arbitrary Act of his Will, and that conſequently Vice might, by a like arbitrary Act of his Will, have been rendered as agreeable and well pleaſing to him as Virtue now is. Things are not valuable with God, or agreeable to him, becauſe he wills them, but he wills them, becauſe they are previouſly valuable with him, or agreeable to him. The Agreeableneſs of Things to God, whereby he is diſpoſed to make them matter of Law, depends not at all upon his Will, an arbitrary Act of his Will, but upon the eternal and unchangeable Nature or Eſſence of the divine Mind. Nor is there indeed the Shadow of a pretence for ſaying, that the reſolving of Obligation into the divine Law implys the contrary.

trary. I desire him therefore to enlarge upon this Matter, and make out some appearance of Consequence at least, for I can discover none at all at present. And he might, I think, with as good a Grace have extracted out of the Notion he is here attacking, the Truth of the Mahometan Religion; for I can not for my Life see, how one Consequence will follow more than the other. Which is all that needs be said to this reasoning of his, 'till he furnishes us with something of a Chain to draw his Premises and Conclusion a little closer together, which at present seem as wide of one another as the two Poles. Indeed if all Moral Obligation be resolved into the Force of Law, it will follow from thence that God is under no such Obligation to the practice of Justice and Goodness, because he is subject to no Law, as having no Superiour: But it will never follow from thence, that he did by an arbitrary Act of his Will render the practice of Justice and Goodness pleasing to him, which antecedently to such an Act, was a matter of meer Indifferency to him, or that Virtue is not Naturally and Essentially agreeable to him. All the Logick in the World will never make that out, I think.

Had God commanded Men, says our Author, *to be unjust or ungrateful, it would have been morally good to be unjust and ungrateful.* No such Matter. By *Actions morally good* are meant such as have a Natural Tendency or Fitness to promote the Well-being and Happiness of Mankind, and are for that reason enjoined by God, and the Practice of them enforced

forced upon Mankind by a Sanction of future Rewards and Puniſhments; and therefore Injuſtice and Ingratitude are utterly uncapable of being render'd morally good by any Law, becauſe of their unalterable Tendency to Miſchief and Miſery.

It only depended, adds our Author, *upon God's good Pleaſure, whether he would give us the preſent Law, ſince he might as well have given us the direct contrary.* I anſwer, he could not *as well* have given us the direct contrary: Virtue is naturally and neceſſarily agreeable and delightful to him, Vice abominable, and what his Soul abhors.

When God, ſays our Author, *exiſted before any Creatures were made, he even then conformed all his Actions to the Reaſons of Things, nay he could not but act according to the Rectitude of his Nature.* Of any Actions of God previous to the Creation of any Thing, excepting that of a Purpoſe to create and conduct them, I have no Notion at all; if our Author has, I wiſh he would impart an Account of them to the World. What does he mean too by ſaying that God *could not but act according to the Rectitude of his Nature?* Did the *Rectitude* of his Nature lay him under an abſolute, real, and proper *Neceſſity* of acting according to it? If that be his Meaning, in order to judge of his Aſſertion, we muſt have Recourſe to the Account he himſelf has given us of this *Rectitude*, p. 11. where he tells us, that *the* Rectitude *of the divine Nature conſiſts in this, that God always did and always will act according to the Relations of Things.* Now, I ſay, it will never follow

follow from God's acting conſtantly in a certain way, that he has not a Power of acting other Ways. He may have ſuch a Power, tho' he be determined never to uſe it. Be it ſo then, that God cannot act but according to the *Rectitude* of his Nature, yet that *Rectitude* as it is deſcribed by our Author, is however no Proof of it.

God, ſays our Author, *cannot but act according to what is fit and right, according to the Relations of Things in his Mind; and if he who is all Perfection cannot but act ſo, it can be no Abſurdity or Contradiction to ſay he is obliged to do ſo.* Again, *where there was no Law, and yet God could not but act according to what was right, there was the higheſt Obligation poſſible.* The Reaſon given here by our Author why it is in his Opinion, no Abſurdity or Contradiction, to ſay God is obliged to act according to the Relations of Things, will by many Readers perhaps be thought a good Reaſon for the quite contrary, many will, I fancy, think, that if God cannot but act ſo, be under an abſolute Neceſſity of acting ſo, it is as improper, as much as Abſurdity and Contradiction to ſay he is under any moral Obligation to act ſo, as it is to ſay the Sun is under a moral Obligation to ſhine. But I have no Occaſion to enter into any Diſpute of that Kind with him. Be that Matter as it will I chooſe to ſhape him a different Anſwer, which is as follows. The Query is whether God can be properly ſaid to be *obliged*, or to lie under any *moral Obligation*. Yes he may, ſays

our Author, and goes about to prove it. Now all Offers or Attempts for that Purpoſe are manifeſtly vain, 'till he has given us a clear and diſtinct Account of what he means by the Word *Obligation*, which he has not yet done; for that his preſent Definition amounts to nothing, is abſolutely unintelligible, I have ſufficiently ſhewn above, I think. He finds Fault with the Notion of *Obligation* pleaded for by the learn'd Author he has attack'd, which is that of a moral Neceſſity ariſing from Law. This he thinks is not a juſt Account of the proper Meaning of that Term, and the Reaſon given for it, is, that God may be properly ſaid to lie under an *Obligation*, tho' he be ſubject to no Law. How does that appear? from hence, ſays he, that *he cannot but act*, i. e. he is under an abſolute Neceſſity of acting *according to the Relations of Things*. Does *Obligation* then ſignify not a moral, but an abſolute Neceſſity of acting ſo or ſo? No, this I ſuppoſe our Author will not venture to ſay neither; becauſe if that was the proper Notion of *Obligation*, Mankind could not be properly ſaid to lie under any Obligation to the Practice of Virtue at all, becauſe they *are under* no ſuch abſolute Neceſſity of practiſing it at all, they not only can, but do practiſe otherwiſe. Explain then, I ſay once again, what you mean by *Obligation*, ſhew that to be what is uſually meant by it in moral Philoſophy, and then we may be able to judge whether the Word be truely and really applicable to God in that Senſe or no, that is, whether

whether God may be properly ſaid to lie under any *moral Obligation* or no. But 'till that is done, your attempting to prove the Affirmative, is indeed attempting to prove juſt nothing at all.

I have now done with our Author, with whom I have taken this Freedom, not out of the leaſt ill-will to him, but regard to what I apprehend to be Truth of Importance, and therefore I hope he will not be offended at this my Performance. If it will not hold, if it is capable of being thoroughly and clearly confuted, I know but few ſo well qualify'd for that Work as himſelf, and ſo he has it in his Power to make it turn to my own Shame only. If the Principle I go upon be Falſe, and my Reaſoning fallacious, I deſire no Quarter from him, or any one elſe, but common Civility in the laying open my Miſtakes. For it is Truth I ſearch after, and the Diſcovery of that will be agreeable to me, let it come from what Hand it will. But ſo long as I think I have reaſon to apprehend my ſelf to be right in this Matter, I ſhall not be wanting for the Defence of ſo good a Cauſe, let who will oppoſe it, provided they do it by the urging of real Difficulties, or plauſible Objections, that have not been obviated or anſwered already. But if any one ſhall think fit to publiſh only old Stuff over again, vamped up with ſome addition of new Language, or different Phraſe, without being at the Pains of looking into what I have already writ upon the Subject, or offering at any Anſwer to it, he may be pretty

pretty ſure of receiving no Diſturbance from me: For I know how to ſpend my Time better than in wrangling with ſuch Triflers.

I have nothing further to add, but a Word or two of Advice, to ſuch as are deſirous to have a thorough ſatisfactory Inſight into this important Debate, which is, that they would be pleaſed to read what Dr. *Clarke* has ſaid upon the Subject in his ſecond Courſe of *Sermons preached at Boyle's Lecture*, my *Foundation of Morality*, what the *Author of the Defence* has thereupon, the Reply to the ſame by his *Learned Adverſary* in his *Supplement*, &c. together with the two firſt Sections of the ſecond Treatiſe in Mr. *Hutcheſon*'s Book, entitled, *An Eſſay upon the Nature and Conduct of the Paſſions*, &c. wherein that Gentleman has ſhewn in the moſt ingenious and unanſwerable manner, the Language of Dr. *Clarke* and his Followers, upon the *Foundation of Morality* to be full of Confuſion and Darkneſs, and indeed void of all meaning. At leaſt let none of my Readers truſt to me alone in this Matter, but carefully compare what I have writ with the Writings I have examined; that they may ſee with their own Eyes, whether I have done Juſtice to the Authors, or no. The beſt and ſureſt Way to come at the Truth in all Controverſies of this Nature, is to examine both Sides ſtrictly and impartially, without Regard to Names little or great.

FINIS.